

Poster

# Ho's Death: 'So It Goes'

CPYRGHT By Nicholas von Hoffman

When during a war the leader of one side dies, it's customary for the other side to cheer. With the passing of Uncle Ho our cheering has been ragged and hesitating.

Here in the homeland of Uncle Ho's most powerful and dedicated enemies, even here his obituaries have been tintured with praise and admiration. You get the feeling that the people who hated him because he was a Communist would have traded Uncle Ho for Thieu, Ky, Diem and several boatloads of the more important corruptionists, dope smugglers, double agents, deserters and liberty lovers allied with us.

Uncle Ho alone appears to have come out of the war with his reputation. In death he seems the one outstanding man the war has produced. This curiously popular head of an enemy country has even had his communism explained away. "He turned to communism as a means—not an end—to achieve his lifelong goal of freedom and unity for his homeland," said the lead editorial in The New York Times.

The pro Uncle Ho sentiment has been so strong that the other night on NBC Chet Huntley had to remind us not to be carried away. The old man had killed a lot of innocent people, he said, but the same has been said of the American Presidents involved in Vietnam.

Our reaction to these massacres is like Kurt Vonnegut's in his novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. "So it goes," he says, because if you meditate on all the death and dying you'll go crazy, the facts'll burn out the eyes of your mind. Uncle Ho killed a lot of people. So it goes. A boy driven mad by the war blows his brains out on the Capitol steps. So it goes.

It was said against Uncle Ho that he was a professional revolutionary. The United States has its professional revolutionaries too. Men like Allen Dulles and Richard Helms, the CIA bosses who differ from Uncle Ho in that he wanted to commit a revolution in his own country while they want to do it in other people's. Uncle Ho was involved in politics so he did what people in that line of work do; what made him different from our bunch were his reasons, or thus it seems, because really we don't know much about him.

We're not even sure what his real name was or if he ever got married. We have some black and white newsreel footage, some snapshots, a couple of old police dossiers; we know he was a good cook and a heavy cigarette smoker who made it to '79. Salons were his brand. . . Oh, you can get the Americans out of the war. But Ho was probably too busy to think up new words to old advertising jingles.

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Maybe if we'd known Uncle Ho better we might not have regarded him with as much respect. The little glimpses make him so attractive. Imagine, a handy-legged wog, renting a Sunday suit to go out to Versailles to present Wilson and Clemenceau with a petition asking that his distant, little colony be granted self-determination . . . and years later Uncle Ho still living like a poor man, wearing sandals cut from old automobile tires. There may have been a mean side to him but we never heard about that. We're left with these brief pictures to match up against our leading men.

Ellsworth Bunker, Ambassador to Vietnam and possessor of a good tailor, back in Washington for consultations as they say, his old eyelids sagging down to make drooping, mysterious triangles of his eyes, murmuring he didn't think he wanted to comment on the repercussions of Uncle Ho's death.

Presidents on airport runways in front of microphones, silvery Air Force One in the background so behind them you can read THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, and you can hear the words, Presidential words, susceptible of many interpretations by American watchers and White House-ologists from the other side of the iron curtain, peace, commitments, honor, face, freedom, treaties, solemnly pledged, bombing, war.

Or the generals, Westmoreland, handsome nonwinner, all jaw and gold braid, Chapman ordering the black and white Marines to stop killing each other and get back to killing the Vietnamese (so it goes), and Hershey, doughty 75-year-old conqueror of ten thousand squeamish liberals, givin' it to the kids and telling them what an honor it is.

The kids went for Uncle Ho. "Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh!" they'd chant at the big rallies to end the war against him. Recently they haven't been chanting so much. General Hershey's been coming down on them heavy and they've had to spend their energy escaping. All over the country, a million bull sessions about that. Don't get busted for pot in Illinois because they've changed the law so it's only a misdemeanor now and a misdemeanor won't keep you out.

It's gotta be a felony. Steal a car, that's good if it's grand theft auto, but joy riding won't keep you out of anything. Be a teacher or a cop or a fag. Get a sympathetic draft board. Cut off a toe. There's lots of nine-toed guys who don't have any trouble hitting on chicks. You can wear shoes. What chick's going to count your toes? I know but I can't do it. Once I put my foot on the kitchen table and I had the cleaver in my hand, but, man, it was my toe, my toe, man. So get married. Have a dependent. Adopt a baby or a sick, old mother.

The kids never blamed Uncle Ho for causing General Hershey to draft so many of them. That was strange but people never were able to work up a good hate against him. Wall Street didn't blame him for the market's not cracking 1,000 on the Dow-Jones. Remember this was the year it was going to happen? The old people didn't blame him for the inflation. Strange. Strange too, thinking about a truce in a war to mourn the other side's leader. The Americans didn't do that for Hitler. The Germans didn't do that for Roosevelt.

Uncle Ho did that to this war, drained our side of righteousness, left us nothing but the fine print and the technicalities. He had a monopoly on the big phrases, the words you put on banners, so we fought for some sentences written by lawyers and printed in agate type and cheered ourselves on with the thought we have a fine professional army doing the job it was sent

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